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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002882

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: TBILISI UPDATE 11/19/2007

REF: A. TBILISI 2855

[1](#)B. TBILISI 2843

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, reason 1.4(b) and (d).

New Ministers Appointed

[1](#)1. (C) Following President Saakashvili's November 16 announcement of Lado Gurgendidze as the new Prime Minister (Ref A), two changes to the cabinet were announced on November 19. Minister of Education Kakha Lomaia was replaced by his deputy at the ministry, Bela Tsipuria. Lomaia was subsequently named the Chairman of the National Security Council, an institution which has been moribund under Kota Kemularia. Lomaia may now inject new life into a badly managed presidential administration. Tsipuria, the second woman named to the cabinet of ministers, studied in the United States under a Muskie Fellowship. Koba Subeliani, head of the Tbilisi City Municipal Improvements Service, will replace Giorgi Kheviashvili as Minister of Refugees.

[1](#)2. (U) Prime Minister Gurgendidze said on November 16 his top priorities will be to start a dialogue with the Georgian people, businesses, foreign investors and the Georgian Diaspora in order to build consensus and continue Georgia's economic progress. Saakashvili hailed Gurgendidze for reviving Georgia's banking sector and called him "Georgia's most successful businessman."

Opposition, Saakashvili Begin Campaigning

[1](#)3. (U) The United National Coalition of Opposition (UNC) announced November 17 plans to begin its presidential campaign on November 19. Representatives from the Republican Party, Conservatives, Georgia's Way, Freedom Party, On Our Own, Party of People, Movement for United Georgia, Georgian Troupe, and National Forum gathered on November 17 to discuss a strategy for UNC presidential candidate Levan Gachechiladze's campaign. Over the weekend, Koba Davitashvili and Jondi Baghaturia of UNC visited markets to call on the traders to vote for Gachechiladze, claiming the removal of the requirement for cash registers for small traders was achieved by the opposition. Republican leader Davit Usupashvili said the real campaign would start only after the date for the election is set and Saakashvili resigns. The January 5 date has not been approved by Parliament but Saakashvili will reportedly resign on November 25 or 26.

[1](#)4. (U) Several other candidates have announced their intention to run for president: Badri Patarkashishvili, Irina Sarishvili, Imedi Political Movement (not related to Imedi

television), Gia Maisashvili, founder of the Party of the Future, the Labor Party's Shalva Natelashvili, and New Rightists founder David Gamkrelidze.

15. (SBU) The opposition claims Saakashvili began campaigning for his reelection immediately following his announcement of new elections in January. The government has recently unveiled large scale social assistance programs, raised salaries for teachers and professors, and increased pensions.

On November 17, Saakashvili gave a speech at the dedication of a museum honoring Georgian patriot Ilia Chavchavadze, drawing heavily on Chavchavadze's memory and calling Badri Patarkatsishvili "evil." He also criticized the business practices of opposition presidential candidate Gachechiladze's Georgian Wine and Spirits Company before it went bankrupt.

Saakashvili Asks OSCE to Send Observers

16. (U) In a November 18 meeting, Saakashvili invited OSCE Mission to Georgia's Head Terhi Hakala to send "hundreds, even thousands" of international observers to the Georgian elections. He said that observers will be able to monitor pre-election campaigns, ensure freedom of speech is protected and prevent discrimination against presidential hopefuls and their campaigns.

Charges Against Imedi and Patarkatsishvili;
Kavkazia TV Back on Air

17. (U) The Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC)

TBILISI 00002882 002 OF 002

suspended Imedi TV's broadcast license for three months. The suspension was dated November 8. The GNCC said the decision was based on the November 7 broadcast by Imedi of "obvious disinformation that police were planning to storm the cathedral of the Holy Trinity." This, GNCC claims, created an imminent and real threat of encouraging violent protests to continue.

18. (U) Over the weekend Rustavi 2, Mze and Channel 1 broadcast a program in which Deputy Chief Prosecutor Nika Gvaramia played taped phone conversations between Imedi co-owner Badri Patarkatsishvili and Imedi journalist and producer Giorgi Targamadze which, Gvaramia claims, demonstrate Patarkatsishvili was "directly controlling Imedi TV's editorial policy." In the program Gvaramia said the taped phone conversations showed "Imedi TV was a weapon in the hands of Patarkatsishvili." On November 17 Saakashvili responded to growing concerns over what appears to be widespread tapping of private phone conversations by saying that any phone tapping was done in accordance with legal procedures and carried out by law enforcement agencies.

19. (U) Gvaramia also alleged on November 16 that two security firms linked to Patarkatsishvili were involved in an attempt to set up an illegal armed group. Gvaramia said the head of both firms, Giorgi Beridze, was arrested November 13 and a large number of weapons were seized from his apartment.

Gvaramia made public recorded conversations wherein Beridze instructed his employees to recruit "good men" "who would be willing to kill without hesitation."

10. (U) Kavkazia TV began broadcasting shortly after the state of emergency was lifted November 16. The pro-opposition station only covers the capital of Tbilisi. Its initial broadcasts were extremely critical of the government.

TEFFT